

LANDOWNERS



LEGISLATIVE • ALERT

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IN A presidential election year one can usually expect some extra twists to the legislative process. But this time around Congress appears to be moving at its typical last minute pace to wrap up major legislative business. There is a large question mark as to the final funding figures for the Interior and Agriculture appropriations bills.

The Forest Stewardship Program and the Stewardship Incentives Program under the Interior bill, and the Forestry Incentives Program under the Agriculture bill are the two bills that contain funding for primary forest landowner assistance programs. Although both the House and Senate have acted independently to approve numbers for the two bills, conferencing or reconciliation of the two has not yet occurred. And as time ticks by, the chances of a stand-alone conference bill diminishes and the prospect of a catch-all omnibus bill rises.

Here's what we know to date:

Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)

The FSP provides technical assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners to develop forest management plans. The FSP supports service foresters in the field to work directly with private landowners seeking assistance on how best to manage their forestland. With no acreage limit, the more than 9 million non-industrial private forest landowners across the country are all eligible to take advantage of this resource.

The House approved numbers slightly better than the Senate, recommending a funding total of \$31.454 million in fiscal year 2001 compared to \$30.454 in the Senate. Funding has steadily increased over the past few years, reinforcing the

findings of the Esseks FSP study as highlighted in the Summer 2000 issue of this magazine (Vol. IX, No. 3). The House figure is expected to stick through conference, providing a solid foundation for the program to operate upon.

Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP)

The cost-share complement to the FSP appears to have lost all favor on Capitol Hill. The SIP provides cost-share money to private landowners to help implement the objectives outlined in forest management plans developed by landowners under the FSP. This might include offsetting costs associated with tree plantings, fish and wildlife habitat improvement and stand improvement.

The SIP has struggled over the past two years and continues to do so as both the House and Senate refused to fund the program at all in fiscal year 2001. With zero funding over the previous two years, the badly needed and popular program has likely seen its last day in the sun. Although SIP may down for the count, this does not mean that a commitment to a cost-share assistance program will be lost. The Esseks study found that forest management plan objectives are two to three times as likely to be implemented and landowners are more inclined to invest more of their own money when

cost-share money is provided. It is this kind of leveraging that is needed to achieve the kinds of goods such as clean air and water, wildlife and timber, that the public demands. The state foresters are actively engaged in developing a new cost-share program to take shape during the 2002 Farm Bill reauthorization process.

Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)

This program has limped along the past few years at a barely serviceable level of \$6 million for a national program. Highly popular in the South for its focus on timber, the FIP looks again to be supported at a similar level. The House continued last year's trend to not fund the cost-share program and the Senate voted to support the program at a level of \$6.325 million thanks to the leadership of Sen. Thad Cochran (R) of Mississippi.

The FIP works similarly to SIP, but focuses more on non-industrial forest landowner timber resources. FIP money goes toward helping landowners with tree thinning, reforestation and other timber stand improvement costs.

Below is a chart outlining the current and past history of forest landowner assistance program funding for the upcoming and past three years.

There is a high likelihood that the two bills will get lumped together in a year-end omnibus appropriations bill, which will give the president greater leveraging power to get more funding for programs he supports. One of the president's current objections is the lackluster level of conservation funding throughout the budget. This opens the possibility that increased funding beyond current House and Senate levels may occur for landowner assistance programs as well as other programs under the State & Private Forestry budget of the USDA Forest Service. 🌲

Program Funding Levels (Millions of Dollars)

	FY '98	FY '99	FY '00	FY '01	FY '01 (Recommendations)	FY '01	FY '01
	Enacted	Enacted	Enacted	Admin.	NASF	House	Senate
FSP	23.880	28.830	29.430	29.407	36.500	31.454	30.454
SIP	6.500	0.000	0.000	3.250	—	0.000	0.000
FIP	6.000	16.325	6.325	0.000	25.000	0.000	6.325